

Indigenous Trustee Greeting

June 2023

Aaniin (Hello), I am Indigenous Trustee for the York Region District School Board and a member of the Chippewas of Georgina Island, the only First Nation in York Region and one you may recognize YRDSB acknowledging as their “partner in education” when providing land acknowledgements.

I would like to offer greetings for the month of June, the month when we recognize and celebrate the Indigenous People of Canada, our unique status as Canadians, our history on this land and our many significant contributions. In 1996, Governor General Romeo LeBlanc declared June 21 as National Aboriginal Peoples Day. He said, “On June 21st, this year and every year, Canada will honour the native peoples who first brought humanity to this great land.” In 2017, the name was formally changed, and we now recognize this day as National Indigenous Peoples Day.

June 21 was chosen because it is summer solstice, a time of spiritual significance for Indigenous people. It is a time when the sun is at the highest point in the sky and we experience the longest day of the year, and the most amount of daylight. This is considered powerful medicine and is a time for practicing ceremonies that honour our interconnection with the land and the cosmos.

The Anishinaabe also recognize June as the month of the Strawberry moon, Ode'min Giizis. The beautiful red heart shaped strawberry offers us the teaching of reconciliation and forgiveness. It is the first berry of the season that brings us that sweetness for life. June offers us many special gifts and much to be grateful for.

People ask what they can do to celebrate Indigenous People Day and as Canadians support Indigenous people in Canada?

We can build our awareness by reading Indigenous books, listening to Indigenous podcasts, and attending Indigenous events. We can create positive change and promote public awareness by lending our support to Indigenous issues. We can also offer land acknowledgements as we do at the beginning of meetings and events in the YRDSB.

However, I believe most importantly to Indigenous people across this planet is to recognize our right to reclaim and practice our Indigenous languages and the important significance of the earth under our feet. Our traditional knowledge and our cultures exist in our languages and without the opportunity to learn them in our schools and speak them in our communities much of our ancestral knowledge will be lost forever.

Further, recognizing Indigenous relationship with the land and taking the time to build land awareness and connection is imperative. We must practice environmental stewardship and protect our greenspaces. Walk in nature, plant, or hug a tree, help a turtle across the road, sing to the water, just be with the land. It does little to offer a land acknowledgement if we do not acknowledge the earth on which we live. The earth is our mother, this is why we call her “Mother Earth” in our Anishinaabe creation stories. We are extrinsically interconnected; without her we would not exist. As her children we must care for her and protect her. Stand with Indigenous people by honouring her, this is the most important land acknowledgement you can give.

Chi-Miigwech and Happy Indigenous People's Day!

Your Indigenous Trustee, Lauri Hoeg

This is a good resource and activity guide for students:

https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-CIRNAC-RCAANC/DAM-PPLCOM/STAGING/texte-text/nIPD_activity_guide_2018_1528380426091_eng.pdf